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## **PRIME MINISTER**

6/96

### **STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER, THE HON P J KEATING MP MURRAY-DARLING BASIN**

Mr Howard's claim to ownership of the sustainable agriculture/landcare/Murray-Darling Basin agenda is a sure sign that once again, the Coalition is struggling to put together anything credible in a key policy area.

If you can't develop a decent policy of your own, just claim that someone who can has stolen yours.

Mr Howard must have been hoping that everyone else had been asleep just like him until late 1995 when he first discovered the Murray-Darling Basin - or that no one had kept any records.

Unfortunately, the rest of us have been aware of the Murray Darling - and land degradation - and the potential of food exports to Asia for quite some time - and actually doing something about it - as the attached records shows.

Unlike Mr Howard, Labor has an unparalleled record of achievements on Landcare, and the Murray -Darling. We don't need to go scratching around in the empty Coalition policy cupboard for a good idea.

The record speaks for itself.

**CANBERRA  
25 January 1996**

## Some Key Dates

1788- 1983: Years of neglect.

- 1983 Labor Government establishes a Commonwealth/State taskforce for drought management. The results included the removal of fodder subsidies which exacerbate land degradation by encouraging overstocking during drought.
- 1983 Removal of tax incentives for land clearing by Treasurer Keating
- 1983 Establishment of the National Soil Conservation Program (NSCP)
- 1988 Establishment of the Murray Darling Basin Commission and Ministerial Council.
- 1988 Commonwealth and States develop and endorse the National Soil Conservation Strategy.
- 1988 Establishment of the Community Landcare component of the NSCP.
- 1989 The launch of the Decade of Landcare with funding of \$320 million over ten years
- 1990 Establishment of the Land and Water Research and Development Corporation
- 1990 National Drought Policy which for the first time ensured that drought assistance took proper regard for environmental factors.
- July 1992 Establishment of the Agri-Food Council with its goal to increase high value-added food exports to more than \$7 billion per year by the end of the decade.
- Aug 1992 Establishment of the Agriculture and Resource Management Council of Australia and New Zealand (ARMCANZ) with the objective of developing integrated and sustainable and natural resource management policies and practices.
- Dec 1992 Prime Minister's Environment Statement incorporating a substantial increases in funding for native vegetation, inland rivers and land and water management.

- 1993-1995 Prime Minister has numerous visits to regional Australia to discuss the drought and the state of our natural resources.
- June 1994 Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council discusses its report "Food into Asia: The Next Steps"
- Nov 1994 Establishment of the Prime Minister's Land Management Taskforce
- June 1995 Prime Minister's Science and Engineering Council discusses its report "Sustaining the Agricultural Resource Base."
- Sept 1995 Prime Minister during a visit to Orange announces an inquiry into "Removing Impediments to the Export of Perishable Produce."
- Oct 1995 Prime Minister meets with Industry Leaders in Canberra to discuss agriculture and our food industries.
- Oct 1995 Prime Minister receives the report of the Land Management Taskforce during a visit to Eyre Peninsula.

### **John Howard's Record**

- 1974-1994 Years of neglect.
- Jan 1995 Ian McLachlan's pamphlet "A Clean Australia" is released with unfunded commitments of between \$5 billion and \$15 billion. Key elements are quickly disowned by the Leader of the National Party, other coalition members, the NFF and others in industry.
- Oct 1995 John Howard expresses general support, but with no details, for the rehabilitation of the Murray Darling system.
- Jan 1996 The nation continues to await details of John Howard's support for the environment and agriculture.